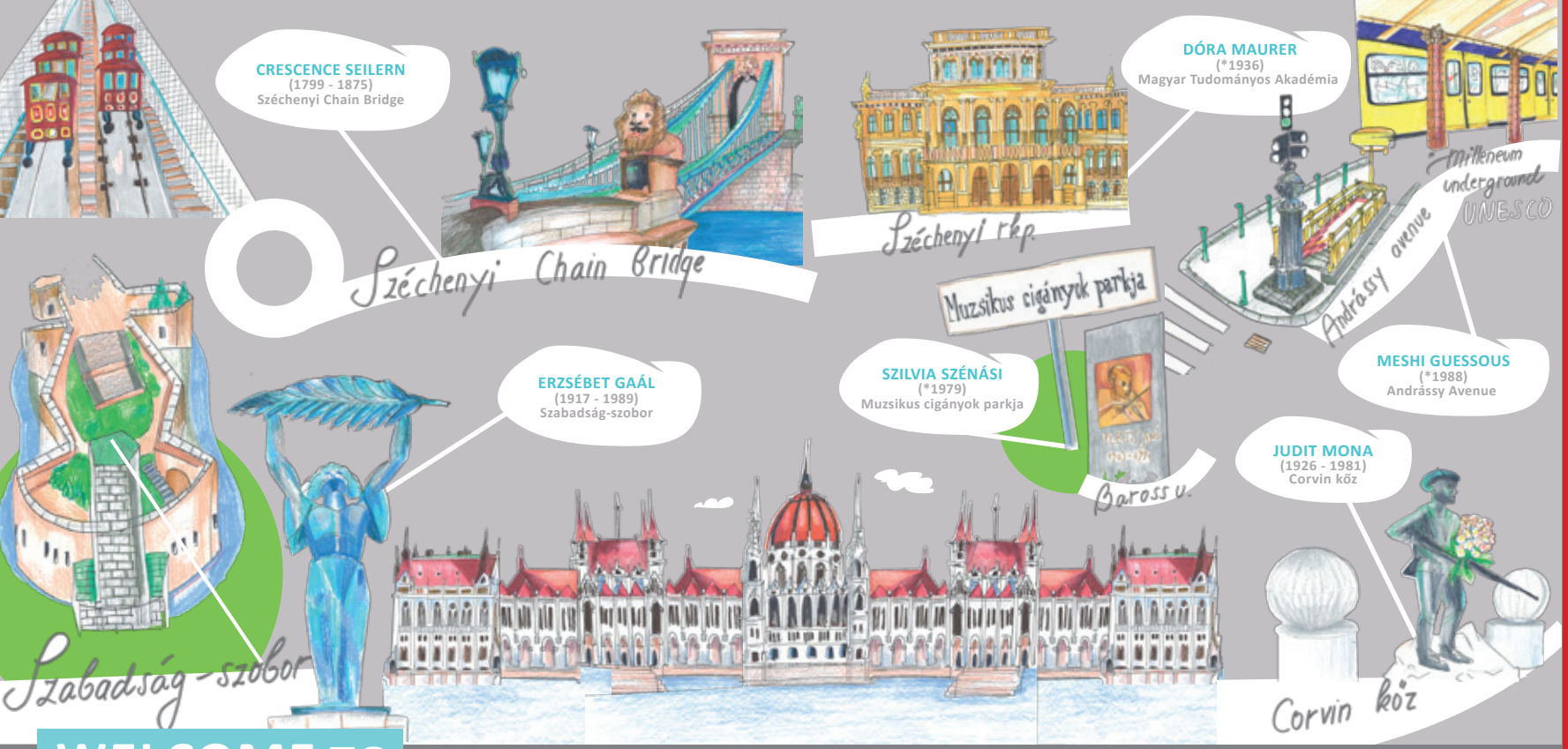

WELCOME TO BUDAPEST

SIGHTSEEINGS IN BUDAPEST

Every year, millions of tourists ride pleasure boats under our beautiful bridges and climb Gellért Hill so that they can take pictures of our world heritage city and the Danube panorama. They explore Buda's medieval Castle District, and, on the Pest-side, the City Centre: Andrássy Avenue and its surroundings from St. Stephen's Basilica to Hero's Square. The eclectic cityscape of Budapest today barely shows any remaining signs of the destruction that took place in World War II or the architectural anomalies of the period of State Socialism. After the regime change, Europe's largest synagogue and second largest parliament were restored to their original beauty. Many, however, are not as interested in tourist sites, as they are in the secret stories told by locals.

It is for them that Budapest Walkshop created walks that thematize the unexplored political past and the unique lives of minorities, along with other programs of interest.

WOMEN CITY TOURS IN BUDAPEST

The Liberty Statue, which towers over Budapest holding a palm branch over her head, is a defining female figure of the capital city. The public spaces of Budapest are adorned with many other symbolic female figures as well, carved out of stone or cast from bronze. Why not commemorate reality instead? The story of Erzsébet Gaál, the flesh-and-blood woman who stood model for the Liberty Statue, is barely known. Nor do we know or remember much about those important female politicians, scientists and public figures who have helped this city thrive. The programs of Budapest Walkshop evoke spaces from the memories of these forgotten women. During our walks, we will also call to mind the centuries of witch trials, as well as the Secession Era, when women finally threw away their corsets and claimed their place in the public sphere. We will also explore the habits and culture of women's communities belonging to the religious and ethnic minorities that live among us.

Crescence Seilern

Crescence Seilern
Countess
1779 - 1875

"Only nobility and the salvation of Hungary should be the aim that unites us. If all teeters, faith still remains."

Countess **Crescence Seilern-Anspang** was born in Brno of Moravia, to a well-connected family, albeit of moderate fame. Of her numerous suitors, it was Károly Zichy Jr. whose marriage proposal the beautiful young woman accepted in August 1819. She was twenty years younger than her new husband, with the added responsibility of also taking care of his seven children from his previous marriage. As an honourable wife and mother, she dutifully took on these responsibility.

In 1823, the mysterious workings of fate sent the young and ardent Count István Széchenyi to cross paths with Crescence. Their personalities could not have been different: the Count had an impulsive nature with a serious – at times even morose – disposition, while the Countess was full of life, possessing a light-hearted, cheerful demeanour. Széchenyi pursued Crescence relentlessly, but, in spite of his frequent amorous overtures, she sent all his letters back unopened. There was even an occasion at the theatre in Bratislava when she simply walked out on him. She was secretly enamoured of the young man, but she wanted to protect her virtue at all costs.

The Count then decided to win Crescence's admiration on the merit of his accomplishments; he sublimated his amorous anguish by throwing himself into his work. In 1832, he set off to England to organize the construction of the first permanent bridge on the Danube (which we know as the Széchenyi Chain Bridge today). The bridge – which was thus born of the inextinguishable flame of the Count's desire for Crescence – later became the chief accomplishment of his lifetime. The bridge was finally handed over in 1849. Today, city dwellers are using Chain Bridge more or less in its original form. Before starting his work on the bridge, Széchenyi had worked on opening the Lower Danube up as a trade route (1830). It was in connection to this endeavour that he was once again travelling on the Danube when he heard of Count Zichy's death. After the year of mourning was over, they got married on 4 February 1836 in a church on Krisztina Square, in the presence of only six witnesses.

They spent their days partly in their residence in Pest overlooking the Danube (and the immense Chain Bridge, inspired by Crescence), and partly in the Castle in Cenk/Tâmpa. In addition to his seven children, the Count looked after his wife's seven adopted children as if they were his own. In the following years, Crescence gave life to two more sons. She supported her husband in everything – to please him, she even learned Hungarian.

Johanna Hevesi Bischitz

Johanna Hevesi Bischitz
Hungarian philanthropist
1827-1898

„The absence of state-funded orphanages became clear to me during my work in the Women's Association, I had to find a remedy for it. Not even one child should be left alone."

Johanna demonstrated her love for humankind during the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848 - 49. She cared for the wounded in her own home in Tata. In 1866, she established the Israelite Women's Association of Pest, which became a prominently important charity institution of the capital city. Its main aim was to offer help to chaste women living in destitution, with special regard for those who are ill, or unable to provide for themselves, or with child, widowed, or orphaned.

She recognized that, due to the growing urbanization, more and more women became vulnerable. She saw education and training of women, as well as securing wage-earning job opportunities for them, as a means to avoid falling into debauchery and prostitution. The association also maintained a girls' orphanage and shelter, where initially it was able to care for twelve orphans, a number that later grew up to 120. The orphanage was once visited by Empress Elisabeth of Austria, Queen of Hungary.

The Women's Association also ran a kosher soup kitchen, which offered warm meals not only to all people in need. The headquarters of the Israelite Women's Association of Pest was located on the corner of Kertész Street and Dob Street, in the building which today houses the Fészek Artists' Club. The institution was financed through fundraising events, such as balls, musical evenings, and theatre performances, which attracted intellectuals, like Lujza Blaha, Ferenc Liszt and Sándor Bródy. These also served as an important opportunity for women to be active participants in the public sphere and paved the way for the acceptance of women's political agency.

Bischitz is also credited with establishing the Capital's Kindergarten Association. She was the first woman who was honoured with a statue in Budapest. The bust is currently placed at the Hungarian Jewish Museum. She did not have children, but she regarded her husband's sons from his first marriage as her own. Nobel Prize Laureate György Hevesy was a descendent of one of the boys. Johanna Bischitz was accorded the title of nobility by Franz Joseph I of Austria. The crowd gathered for her funeral was comparable to the procession of Lajos Kossuth, former governor-president of Hungary. Various social institutions in the 6th district still bear her name today.

Judit Mona

„The country's situation should be improved first."

Judit Mona
physicist, revolutionary
1926 - 1981

Judit Mona was born into a family with three children in Tápiósüly. Her parents had a leftist affinity; her mother joined the Social Democratic Party, her father guarded the borders of the Hungarian Socialist Republic as a soldier of the Red Army. She studied medicine, and in 1951, she married her fellow student, Attila Lehoczky. Their son was born in 1955.

On 23 October 1956, on her way home from work, traffic came to a standstill: the Stalin statue was in the process of being taken down. She also witnessed the seizure of the radio station. At the beginning, she provided medical help in K□bánya, and after a few days, she joined the fighters at the Corvin Passage. She became the chief physician in Práter Street and obsessively worked in a makeshift operating room. She also treated members of the State Protection Authority (ÁVH). When a rebel expressed his disapproval, suggesting harsher treatment, she replied: "Fighter, how can you speak like this? That would make us just like them."

On 6 November, along with the majority of Corvinists, she set off toward the western border. The couple had no choice but to leave Hungary together in late November, without their child. First they lived in Vienna, then in Geneva, while also maintaining contact with the Hungarian Revolutionary Council. In a bold move, her husband managed to bring their child out of Hungary.

Shortly after, they moved to the United States, first to New York, then to Buffalo, where they changed their family name to Lehotay. They encountered difficulties when the Americans refused to accept their Hungarian diploma, so they had to start their professional careers over. Judit began to work as a pathologist in various hospitals, then obtained her medical degree in New York. A successful career followed: she became a forensic expert, gained membership to numerous American scientific associations and became the first female member of the leadership of the National Association of Medical Examiners. Her achievements attracted a significant amount of publicity.

Judit found it important to hold on to her Hungarian roots. She became a leading member of the US Federation of Hungarian Freedom Fighters. She was also involved with organizational activities of the American-Hungarian scouting movement. She died at a young age, in 1981.

Etelka Kuntich

Etelka Kuntich "Sister Tarsitia"
nun, nursery school teacher
1911 - 2009

„I was asked many times why I helped – well, because I had the opportunity to do so."

Etelka Kuntich was a sister in the Austrian-founded Order of the Daughters of Divine Love. During World War II, she lived in the Order's convent located on Budapest's Sváb Hill, where she also worked as a nursery school teacher. In the wake of the German occupation, the deportations began. Sympathizers of the Arrow Cross Party, which rose to power a few months later, held spontaneous raids during which they dragged away and executed countless Hungarian Jews. During such an event, Sister Tarsitia saved Jewish children who were sheltered in the convent from being shot into the Danube, while Adolf Eichmann, a German Nazi SS-Obersturmbannführer and his men, who arrived in Hungary in March 1944 to organize deportations, were lodged at the Hotel Majestic, a Bauhaus-style building located near the convent, which still remains unmarked today.

The war brought dramatic changes in the lives of the sisters as well. During the siege of Budapest, the building was occupied by Russian soldiers. Then, following a brief, peaceful period after the war, a tractor school was moved into the convent. In 1950, after the Communist regime change, all monastic orders were disbanded and the State seized control of all church property. The sisters were forced to seek employment as civilians, which resulted in a difficult situation since they were stigmatized because of their monastic background. They were rarely able to find employment within their original professions, as nurses, or school and nursery school teachers, and even if they did, their past at the convent had to be kept secret.

Etelka Kuntich ended up working as a loader in a mine, where, due to the hard physical labour she had to perform, her health deteriorated. Later, she was entrusted with the task of organizing a local nursery school in the nearby village of Olaszfalu. The former nun devoted her entire life to educating children. The children whom she had saved during the war remained in contact with her even as adults, up until her death in 2009. They were instrumental in her receiving the Yad Vashem Institute's honorary title of Righteous among the Nations in 1998. The community of the village of Olaszfalu, albeit unaware of her activities during the war, erected a memorial to Etelka Kuntich – not lifesaving nun, but legendary nursery school teacher.

Erzsébet Gaál,
healthcare worker
1917-1989

Erzsébet Gaál

„You know, there have been many undeserving people that I held up a palm leaf for..."

Erzsébet Gaál, a 28-year-old healthcare worker, was glimpsed by sculptor Zsigmond Kisfaludi Stróbl in a tram stop in October 1945. The renowned artist had been commissioned to create a monument commemorating the liberation of Hungary, to be erected on Gellért Hill. Instead of the prima donna of the Bolshoi Ballet or other celebrities, Kisfaludi found her the most suitable model for the project.

Little is known about Erzsébet's youth. At the time she met Kisfaludi, she lived in a small village. It took three entire days for Kisfaludi to explain the position of the body, the head and the palm branch. She finally stood model for ten days, holding up the palm branch for twenty minutes at a time. Her waist-long hair had been cut and was blown by a fan in representation of the wind of the Danube. Erzsébet undertook this task as community service for which she was offered no payment. She was not invited to the unveiling.

Erzsébet worked as an X-ray assistant. She got married and gave birth to a baby girl, of whom she asked Kisfaludi to be the godfather. Erzsébet became something of a celebrity with the Soviets. They named school clubs and a school after her. She was awarded the status of honorary pioneer, and many maintained correspondence with her. In Hungary, journalists and pioneers asked for Erzsébet's photo and a few lines, usually just preceding the 4th of April, the date marking the anniversary of Hungary's liberation.

Her private life was less of a success. Her husband left her and then died. In spite of her fame – she was simply known as "the statue" – she had financial struggles towards the end of her life. After her death, she was not given an honorary grave. Furthermore, the state was only willing to cover the cost of her funeral if it did not include the services of a priest. With this condition, the grieving daughter did not accept the offer. On the tomb of Erzsébet Gaál, located in Sopron, the following inscription was engraved: "Here lies the model of the Liberty Statue".

This story is recounted by university professor and historian Andrea Pető in the framework of the bus tour "Women in the Labyrinth of Budapest", organized by Budapest Walkshop.

Andrea Ausztrics

Andrea was born in Budapest, she works as a freelance creative producer, curator and media artist focusing on social issues and representations of cultural identity and memory. She studied at ELTE's Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Departments and at the NYU as a Fulbright scholar and holds master degrees in Aesthetics and Cultural Anthropology. Parallel to her projects, she is working on her PhD about Innovative Jewish Museums, a comparison between the European and the American best practices.

Andrea Ausztrics
Filmmaker

What does it mean to you to have grown up in Eastern Europe?

The regime change came after my first year in primary school. I still recited poems as a young pioneer, but never had the real community experience. Due to the end of the socialist era, me and my generation and I were influenced by the new opportunities in education: we knew that we could study abroad but most of us couldn't afford it.

As a child, did you already know what you wanted to be as a grownup?

Ever since childhood, I have been interested in the humanities and studying in an interdisciplinary setting. When I was ten, I fantasized about finding a world that was still undiscovered. What I envisioned was something halfway between an explorer and a historian. In the end, I received my graduate degree in cultural anthropology and aesthetics with a specialization in film. Filmmaking was the constant thing in the chaos.

What other areas do you work in?

I volunteered for a Jewish civil organization, mainly shooting videos, taking photos, and also organizing programs. I was free to experiment. This led me to documentary filmmaking. In the meantime, I also began my doctoral studies in Social History about innovative Jewish museums in Europe and America. In a kind of zigzag, everything comes together at some point. The Fulbright Scholarship allowed me to live in NewYork for a year. It was a milestone for me in letting certain things go. Now I accept that I don't really work in my actual profession. I am simultaneously involved with multiple things, as a producer, documentary director, video artist, curator, doctoral researcher, etc. I experiment with intermedial and transdisciplinary things, and I try to travel as much as I can to gather inspiration.

What is your favorite place in the city?

At the moment, it's the monastery where catholic nun Etelka Kuntich lived for years. This is where we present my documentary about her (The Silent Hero), at the original location, which is available by organized city walks.

Majda Mária Guessous

Junior Prima Prize winning Hungarian-Moroccan singer. She studied as a performer and teacher of folk songs at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, where she became a professor of folk singing. Meshi's voice has reached audiences not only in the US, Turkey, and Morocco, but in Kazakhstan, India, Bahrein, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. As an artist of Yehudi Menuhin's MUS-E Program, she holds music therapy sessions for socially underprivileged children.
In 2017, she became a TEDxYouth speaker.

Majda Mária Guessous
Singer

Meshi, what is your inspiration?

I discuss the topic of change with underprivileged children and adults, who have lived difficult lives, and whose perseverance and cheery attitude can serve as an example to all of us. With an audio recorder in my hand, I listen to their stories and watch their eyes sparkle. This is how songs are born from our conversations.

Please tell us about your childhood?

I come from a Hungarian-Moroccan family. These two identities as an "organic whole" have been a central experience to me since childhood. They opened a bridge towards Hungarian folk music and the seemingly remote Eastern cultures. I enjoy creatively playing with Hungarian, Arabic, Turkish, Indian and other musical traditions.

How many languages do you speak?

To me, language is a kind of music. When learning an ethnic song, I always ask for the assistance of a native speaker in order to achieve the best possible pronunciation. Now I sing in over ten languages. To my delight, we receive invitations from all around the world. In 2017, the Guessous Meshi Trio was invited to Kuwait and twice to Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Do you have any other interests?

Teaching is really important to me along with raising awareness about social problems. Since 2010, I have been teaching at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. I also hold music therapy sessions for primary school children from underprivileged backgrounds, and I had the opportunity to hold such a workshop in Portugal.

Which locations would you associate your career with?

Two important locations of my career are linked to the Andrássy Avenue, which is a World Heritage site. I completed my education as a performer and teacher of folk songs on the Liszt Ferenc Square at the Liszt Ferenc Academy. Today, I teach folk singing there, training the next generation of artists. I only need to hop on the famous Millennium Underground and travel two stops to get to one of my favourite venues: the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre, housed in a beautiful, eclectic palace.

Dóra Maurer

Dóra Maurer began her conceptual art practice in the late 1960s, combining various media. Her art educational and curatorial activities comprise an essential part of her oeuvre; she has been organizing exhibitions since the 1970s. At the same time, she initiated workshops dealing with visual education, film and photography. In 1990, she started an interdisciplinary painting class at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts. She is the first woman ever elected to lead the Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts.

Dóra Maurer
Grafic artist, filmmaker

Since when have you been preoccupied with colours?

Not even my black and white graphic works were meant to be colourless. I tried to find rich technical momenta in the case of etchings so that they ranged from velvety black to thin grays, from extreme sharpness to softness. I wanted the single elements of an image to obtain individual character. I also painted of course, using strong colours from the beginning, and I drew many portraits. They were so characteristic that my models stopped saying hi to me. These were not caricatures, they were just sharp characters.

Your early works don't reflect the influence of contemporary art…

In 1963, when I got out of the country, I brought everything with me that had culturally touched me up until then. Primarily, I was interested in art history from the Greeks to German expressionism. I wasn't aware of the existence of contemporary art before, or if I was, I regarded it as a fragment that could not provide me with the wholeness I was looking for. It was around this time that I began to notice contemporary art, beginning with Art informel.

In 1982, you did space painting in Buchberg, Austria?

Yes, Buchberg was a key event in my life that opened up a lot of opportunities. I read about psychedelic art and ornamental paintings with which junkies covered their walls. I ended up painting a tower room in a castle inherited by Dieter Bogner. The specific dimensions and irregularities of the space clash with the regularity of the painted figures, which lends the space a kind of uncertainty. It can still be seen today.

Teaching has been an important part of your work…

In the early 80s, I had a photo and film circle at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, where I had to manage children who rather avoided museums. At the Hungarian Academy of Applied Arts, I led visual, audiovisual, and experimental courses, which involved no talking, only doing. I introduced an interdisciplinary approach to my painting class at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Andrea Pető

Researcher of women's history. Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University in Budapest and a Doctor of Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Author of 5 monographs, editor of 31 volumes, as well as 261 articles and chapters in books published in seventeen languages. She was awarded the 2018 ALLEA Madame de Staël Prize for her outstanding scholarly contribution to Europe's gendered memory of the Second World War, the Holocaust and political extremism.

Andrea Petö
Historian, gender researcher

How did you become interested in women's history?

I studied at the University of Freiburg, where I found a shelf in the library filled with interesting historical works, all written about women.

You often refer to interview sources. Why is the application of new research methods necessary in the field of gender studies?

Since women had not been in contact with institutions that the state keeps records on, almost nothing can be found on them in the archives. This makes traditional research difficult, and brings interdisciplinary methods in. Also, historians must keep in mind that there are various perspectives, be it an official record, or the memories of an eyewitness.

How is research in the fields of gender and women's history regarded in Hungary today?

Many things have changed. There are more accredited programs in women's history, new departments have been established. Unfortunately, however, young colleagues have no chance to find a relevant job after graduation, leading to a decrease in the applications.

What inspired you to lead feminist sightseeing tours in Budapest?

I participated in a tour focusing on the women of Novi Sad, organized by the local Women's Centre. After that, I started to research Budapest locations relevant in the lives of important women.

Why did you decide on a bus tour rather than a walking tour?

Anna Lénárd, head of the BUPAP Walkshop, suggested the bus tour to cover the entire city. We follow the tourist route, but I highlight details not visible to the eye, like the story of Johanna Bischitz, or the model of the Statue of Liberty. There are very few commemorative plaques for important women, statues have been removed and streets renamed in an effort to render the left-wing tradition invisible.

Where do you get off the bus?

We stop behind the City Park to visit the Hermina Chapel, built in memory of Palatine József's daughter. Guests can compare the story I tell with the official one lacking in women, just like narratives of other city spaces in Budapest.

Szilvia Szénási

Szilvia Szénási is the Chief Executive Officer of the UCCU Roma Informal Educational Foundation. She began her career as a family caregiver, her work included community organization and the mitigation between Roma families and local communities. She studied Social Work at the Loránd Eötvös University, and later on completed a Roma Access Program at the Central European University in Budapest. She attended a family therapy training as well, which knowledge she successfully integrates into her work.

Szilvia Szénási
CEO of the UCCU Foundation

What kind of work do you do?

I have been the CEO of the UCCU Foundation for the past year and a half, it completely fills my life since. We aim to facilitate personal encounters between Roma and non-Roma youth. Our educators hold interactive classes on Roma identity and culture for 10 to 19 year olds. We aim to expose students to as much information about, and as many experiences with the Roma as possible, opening these young individuals towards each other. We provide community building and leadership trainings for young Roma people as well.

What did you do before you became Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation?

Originally, I started as a musician, coming from a family of Gypsy musicians. After highschool, I took a tour guide training, I was just trying to find my place. My parents urged me to get an education, but my extended family never understood why I didn't want to settle and have children right away. I used to give cello lessons and it was the father of a student who mentioned a university prep course launched by the Kurt Lewin Foundation. This was the first time I met other young Roma people. Until then, I had always been the only Gypsy anywhere I went.

How did you end up working at UCCU?

A colleague of mine told me that the Foundation was recruiting volunteers. After applying, I worked as a volunteer for the following four years, before I got my current position. I have never thought I would be leading this foundation one day. I have finally found the place and community that I have been looking for all my life.

What is your favourite spot in Budapest?

One of my favourite activities is our walk through the 8th district, aiming to get rid of stereotypes, prejudices and false beliefs associated with the area. I love the district, more specifically, the Park of Gypsy Musicians, and the music and people whom you find in this park. Gypsy music is part of my identity. My dream is to do a city walk in this park and introduce my audience to its Gypsy musicians and composers.

Authors Hungary:
Interviews:
Andrea Ausztrics, *Anna Lénárd*
photo: Andrea Ausztrics
Meshi Guessous, *Réka Kemény*
photo: ?
Dora Maurer, *Dorka Kiss*
photo: Katalin London
Andrea Pető, *Réka Kemény*
photo: Dániel Kováts
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Historical women:
Johanna Bischitz, *Gabriella Dohi*
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Erzsébet Gaál, Réka Kemény
photo: Fortepan
Etelka Kuntich, *Dorka Kiss*
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Judit Mona, László Eorsi
1. portrait of Judit Lehoczky
Crescentia Seilern, *Ádám Németh*
photo: ?